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AMERICAN INDIAN GAMES (1902)

By STEWART CULIN

It is with some hesitation that I again present an article on a subject which has engaged my attention for many years. I propose briefly to summarize the results of my investigations of Indian games since 1897, when, in a paper read before the American Folk-lore Society,¹ I announced the conclusions to which I had arrived at that time. Since that period, chiefly through the enthusiastic energy of my friend Dr George A. Dorsey, a vast amount of new material has been collected which has greatly increased the probabilities of comparative study.

I have now to propose a new classification of Indian games, a classification similar to that used in the arrangement of the collection exhibited by the University of Pennsylvania at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, and one designed to include all our aboriginal games in which implements are employed. Indian children play a great variety of games, chiefly mimetic, without implements, such as tag, etc., corresponding with those of the children of civilization, but their exclusion does not affect the issues which are involved in the present discussion.

The games of the American Indians may be divided into two general classes—games of chance and games of dexterity. Games of pure calculation, such as chess, are entirely absent. The games of chance fall into one of two categories: First, games in which implements, like dice, are thrown at random to determine a number or numbers, the sum of the counts being kept with sticks, pebbles, etc., or upon an abacus or counting board or circuit; second, games in which one or more of the players guess in which of two or more places an odd or particularly marked lot is concealed, success or failure resulting in the gain or loss of counters.

The games of dexterity may be enumerated as: First, archery in its various modifications; second, a game of shooting at a moving

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target consisting of a netted wheel or of a ring ; third, a game of sliding javelins upon the hard ground or ice ; fourth, the game of ball in several highly specialized forms ; fifth, the racing games, more or less interrelated to and complicated with the ball games. In addition there is a subclass of the game of shooting at a moving target, of which it is a miniature and solitaire form. Games of all these classes are found among all the Indian tribes of North America, and constitute the games, *par excellence*, of the Indians. Children have a variety of other amusements, but those above described are played only by men and women, youths and maidens, and not by children, and usually at fixed seasons, once as the accompaniment of certain festivals or religious rites.

There is a well-marked affinity and relationship between the manifestations of the same game, even among the most widely separated tribes, the variations being more in the material of the implements, due to environment, than to the object or method of play. Precisely the same games are played by tribes belonging to unrelated linguistic stocks, and in general the variations do not follow the differences in language. At the same time there appears to be a progressive change from what seems to be the oldest form, from a center in southwestern United States along lines north, northeast, and east. Similar changes probably occurred along lines radiating from the same center southward into Mexico. From such accounts of the Aztec games as have come down to us, they appear to be invariably higher developments of the games of the wilder tribes. Under no circumstances could they be regarded as the original forms. In the same way, the old games found in the cliff-dwellings are frequently of more highly developed types than those which exist among living tribes. The games of the Eskimo are all extensions of the same games we find among the Indians, but show always greater simplicity, lack of tradition, and a degradation of form which would preclude their being regarded as the source of the Indian games.

There is no evidence that any of the games above described were imported into America at any time, either before or after the conquest. On the other hand, they appear to be the direct and natural outgrowth of aboriginal institutions in America. They

show no modifications due to white influence other than the decay which characterizes all Indian customs under existing conditions. It is possible, however, that the wide distribution of the "hand game" is a matter of comparatively recent date, due to wider and less restricted intercourse through the abolition of tribal wars. Playing cards, and probably the simple board game known to the English as "merrills," are the only games borrowed by the Indians from the whites. On the other hand, we have taken lacrosse in the north and racket in the south; and the Mexicans of the Rio Grande play most of the Indian games under Spanish names.

My first conclusion as to the interrelation and common origin of Indian games was based on a comparative study of the stick-dice game, published in the Report of the U. S. National Museum for 1896. It appeared that the number of the sticks was originally four, and that the dice were originally made of canes, being the shaftments of arrows, painted or burned with marks corresponding with those used to designate the arrows of the four world-quarters. One of the four arrow-canes bore special marks which identified it with the throwing-sticks anciently used in the Southwest to propel an arrow in lieu of a bow. This specially marked cane, which gave an additional count when it fell uppermost, is perpetuated in a similarly marked implement giving an augmented count in a majority of the stick-dice games played throughout the continent. In the same way the marks on the other sticks can be referred very directly to the arrow-cane shaftments of the world-quarters. Again, in one of the widely distributed types of the guessing games, the number of places of concealment is four, and the implements in which the object was hidden were derived from the four marked arrow-shaftments of the four directions. In general, in all the games we find an arrow, or a derivative of the arrow, the predominant implement, and the conception of the four world-quarters the fundamental idea.

It became apparent that the relation of the Indian games to each other in the same area, and each to its counterpart among all the tribes, is largely dependent on their origin in magical ceremonies. Back of each game we find a ceremony in which the game was a significant part. The ceremony has commonly disappeared, and

the game survives as an amusement, but often with traditions and observances that serve to connect it with its original purpose. It follows that a correct understanding of the origin and final significance of our Indian games can be obtained only through a more or less perfect knowledge of the rituals and symbolism of the various tribes. Fortunately there remain certain tribes in which games occupy their original place in the religious life of the people, or a middle stage in which they are practised both as a rite and as an amusement. This is true both in Zuñi and in the Hopi towns of Arizona. The Zuñi war god Ahaiuta is the patron of games, and the offerings deposited at his shrine consist of miniature representations of the gaming implements. On the Hopi altars, which are erected in the kivas at the various annual ceremonies, the gaming implements are the most significant objects. This is especially true of the altars of the Flute fraternities, where we see the miniature ring and dart of the hoop-and-pole game, the kicking billets of the kicked-stick race, and the tubes of the hidden-ball game—the latter often stuck like flowers in two sand mountains, corresponding with the two sand mountains of the Zuñi game.

The altar itself frequently appears to be the place where the divination was performed with the gaming implements. Not a few of the ceremonial offerings that are made at shrines prove to be conventionalized games, and even the images of the gods themselves, round billets, are related in some direct way to the gaming tubes, if, indeed, they are not derived from them. In one instance a sand or dry painting is used as the gaming circuit or diagram.

Turning to the masks and other paraphernalia worn in the dances and ceremonies, we find a constant use of the gaming implements as essential parts of the costume. The ring at the base of the Hopi and Zuñi masks is the gaming ring for the hoop-and-pole game. We discover it again among the Hupa in California, where a feather dart is stuck in either side. It is not unlikely to be the origin of the headbands of the northern coast tribes. Indeed the rings and bands of Indian costume may in general be traced to the game ring. As an illustration in point we find miniature rings surprisingly like game-rings worn as hair-ornaments by the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Dakota. At last I learn that they are prizes for

the hoop-and-pole game, awarded to the successful contestant for a year.

Returning to the Hopi masks, we discover that their ring-shaped mouths are also gaming rings. On one the nose consists of a feather dart placed just above it. The masks themselves are derived from the tubes of the hidden ball. Their eyes are the balls that are hidden, and one finds the counting-sticks placed like a visor over certain specimens. Again, the netted hoop of the hoop-and-pole rises as part of the head-dress of other masks. The head-dress of the Flute priest at Oraibi consists of the corn-husk wheel and darts, and the four flower-like cups of the hidden ball.

Nor, as I have already indicated, is this use of gaming implements confined to any particular tribe or tribes. For example, the woven and painted cloth that is worn suspended from the forehead down the back, among the Hupa, is the mat upon which they played their favorite game of sticks, or *kiñ*.

Turning now from the altars and costumes to the ceremonies themselves, we find the games surviving in their original forms. The idea of the dual principles of nature—the masculine and the feminine—is everywhere conspicuous in their symbolism. The arrow, in general, is regarded as masculine. The common female symbol is the netted wheel or one of its many derivatives. This netted wheel is copied from the spider-web, the attribute of the Spider-woman, the Earth-goddess, the mother of the Twin War-gods. The ceremonies in which it is employed are magical rites to secure fertility, and the games in which it is used are all significant of the same idea. Among the Dakota it is called the elk game. The Pawnee know it as the buffalo game, and play it "to make buffalo." The Wasco of Columbia river play it to insure a good run of salmon. Among the Hopi its employment is bound up with the fertilization and growth of corn. In its miniature and solitaire form, of which I have already spoken, it is played by lovers and is widely known as the "match-making" or "matrimonial" game.

Turning to another of the sacred games for which the implements are sacrificed upon the altar of the War-god, we find the stone ball of the kicking-race ceremonially deposited on the Hopi *Powamu* altar, and the race itself a magical rite to secure fields within its

circuit against sandstorms. The ball-race is repeated by many of the adjacent tribes, with some of whom, as with the Mexicans of the Rio Grande, it has lost all ceremonial significance.

In general the ball games have yielded least fruitful results to my comparative study. The two principal games were racket and shinny. The morphology of the racket is not yet clear to me. It appears to have some connection with the web of the Spider-goddess, but I am unable to demonstrate that this was the source of its origin. On the other hand it is a practical throwing contrivance, akin to the throwing-stick. The game of ball with rackets may be a dramatization of war. Mr Mooney has pointed out that the ball game receives the name of war among the Cherokee. Shinny in general is the woman's game, but among some tribes it is played by men. As to the ball, there are two forms, one bag-shaped, and the other disk-shaped, flat, with a medial seam. The two sides of the latter are frequently painted different colors, and the ball itself has a symbolism, not yet understood, referable to the earth, the moon, or the sun.

Of all the American ball games, the most interesting and peculiar is the widely-distributed woman's game of double ball. I found it among the Hupa, played by men with two billets tied with cords, and was led to refer it to the ceremony in the Hopi Flute "dance" where the Flute-boy and Flute-maid toss an annulet and a billet by means of a slender stick into the meal-traced cloud symbols, as they advance in procession back to the mesa on the ninth day of the ceremony. This theory received unexpected confirmation in a discovery made by the Hyde Exploring Expedition at Pueblo Bonito. Here, in a sacrificial deposit in one of the chambers, were a number of beautiful flutes, together with curved billets and sticks for throwing them, easily recognizable as having been used in a game or ceremony akin to the double-ball game.

Time and space do not permit me here to enter into a discussion of the details of the games. To me their direct interest is exceeded by the many side-lights which are thrown by their study on primitive life and thought, by the many practical identifications of things which heretofore have been strange and obscure. A single illustration will suffice: The Zuñi, like many other tribes, play a

dice game in a flat basket similar in form to the Oraibi basket-trays. It has been a favorite notion with me that this appliance was in some way a derivative of a shield, and I was led to collect information about the flat Hopi baskets. From a manuscript of the late A. M. Stephen, who spent many years among the Hopi, I learned that their name for shield is *tü-u'-po-o-ta*; but *po'-o-ta* is the name of these flat baskets. With this significant information it became apparent that these baskets, with their figures of eagles, etc., used for offerings on the shrine, were *basket shields*. This identification furnishes a clue to the explanation of many basket patterns. The so-called Navaho marriage basket, with its "life-line," contains a conventionalized bird, made "alive" by the break in the design which thus determines it as a bird. It would seem, too, with this explanation in mind, that the identification of many of the Hopi bowl designs becomes comparatively easy.